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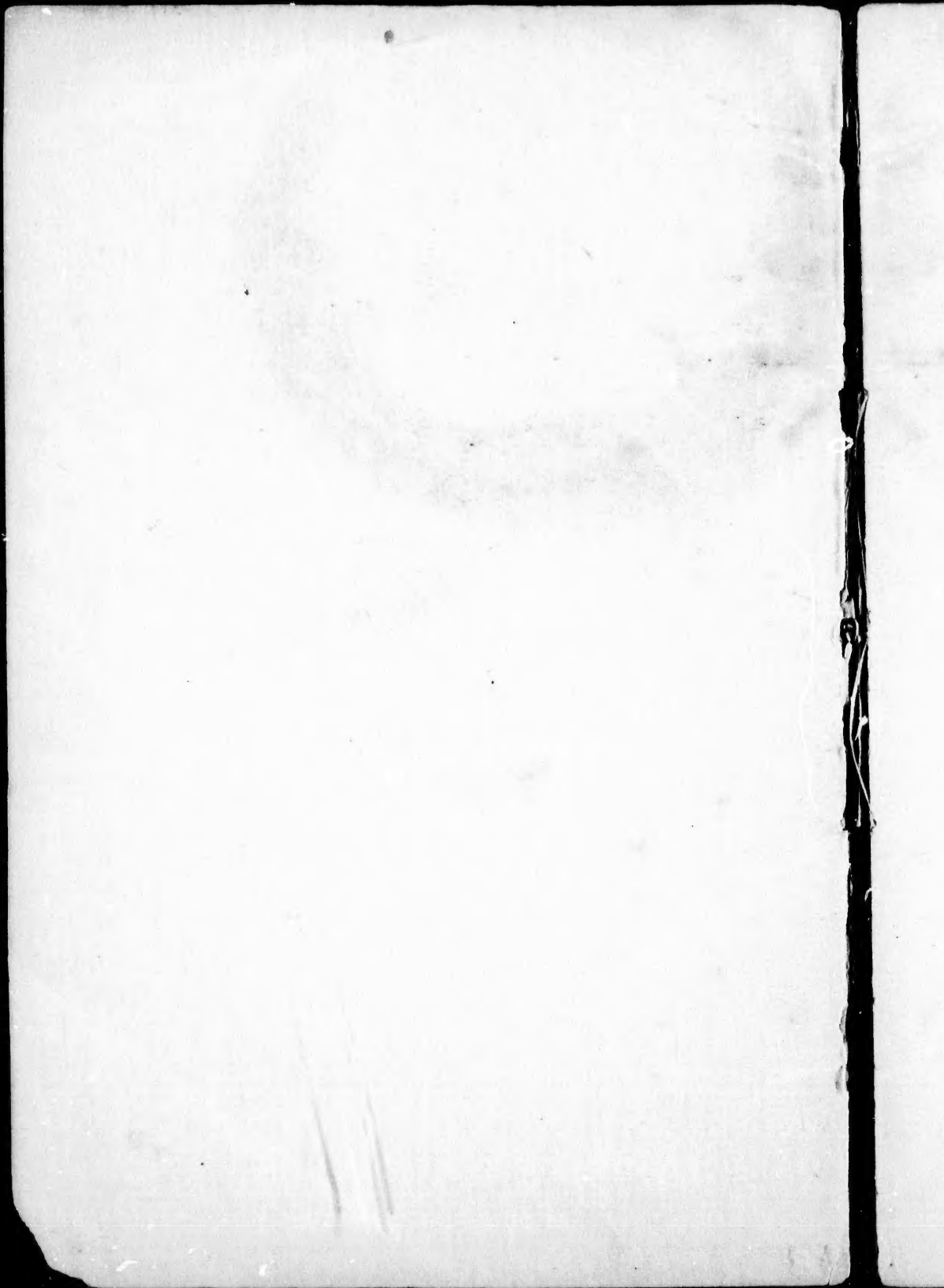


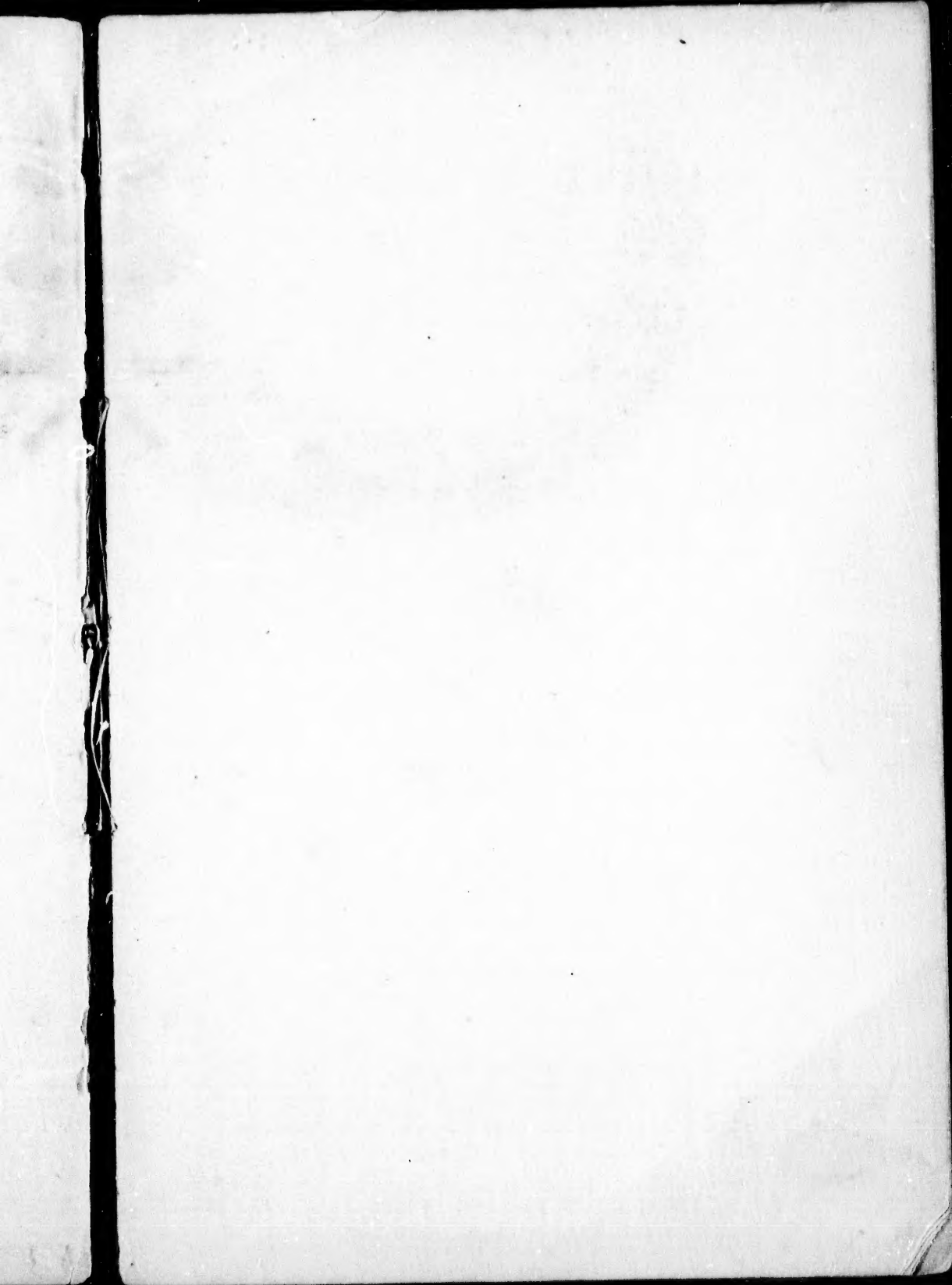
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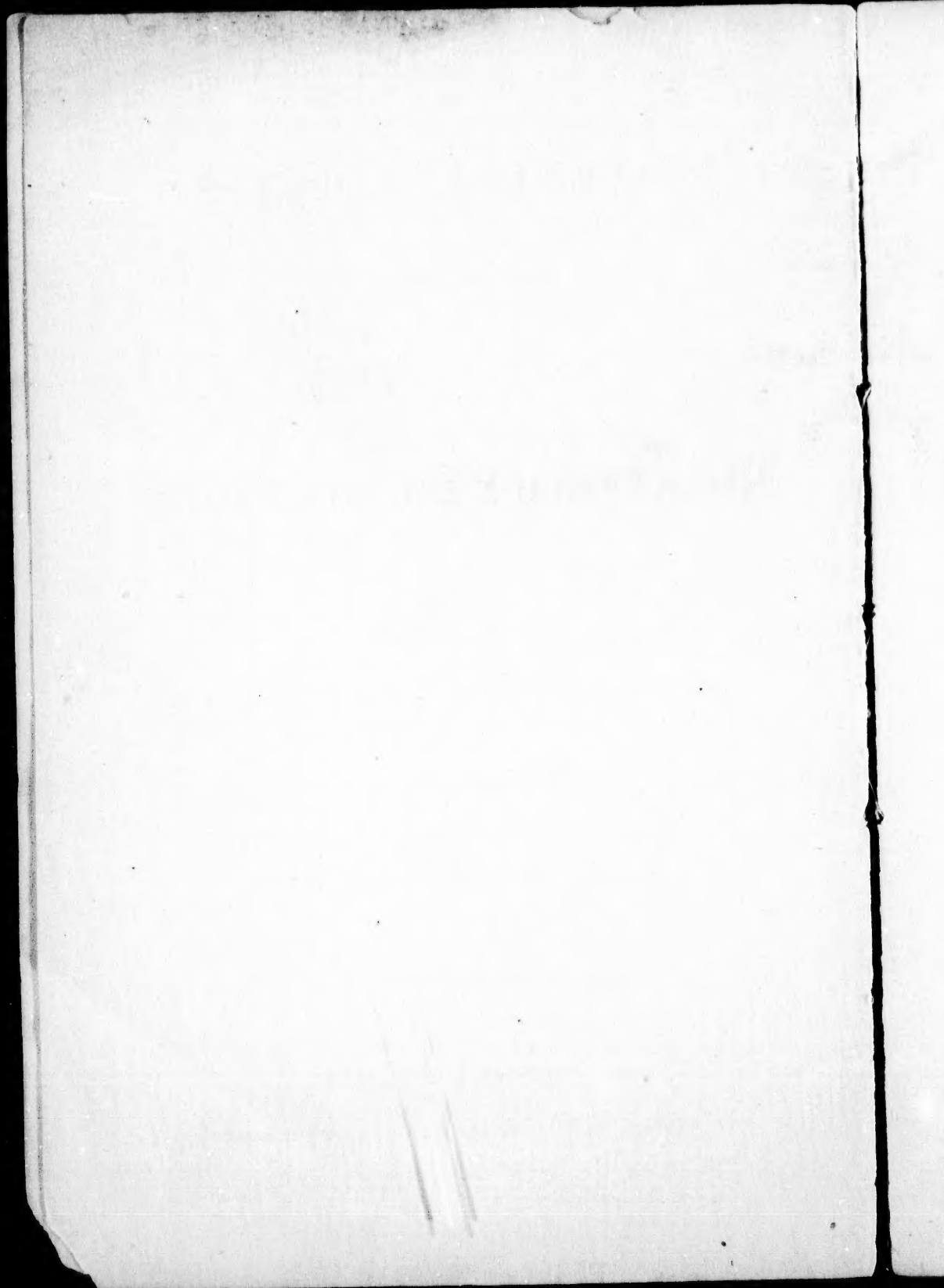
Metaphysical and Literary Society.

INAUGURAL ADDRESS.

1873.







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INAUGURAL ADDRESS

DELIVERED BEFORE

KNOX COLLEGE

Metaphysical & Literary Society

BY

J. Scrimger

THE PRESIDENT, J. SCRINGER, M.A..

ON THE EVENING OF

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INAUGURAL ADDRESS.

To the Members of Knox College Metaphysical and Literary Society.

GENTLEMEN,—On this the occasion of our first public meeting for the present session, I shall avail myself of the opportunity usually afforded to the President, of addressing a few words to the members of this Society. And allow me in the first place to express to you my thanks for having elected me to fill a position honourable in itself, and rendered more so by the gentlemen whose names have been associated with it in years gone by. It was with some misgiving that I accepted it, for while it is an honourable position, I feel that it is one that brings with it no slight responsibility; and most especially do I feel that responsibility to-night, when I remember that, willingly or unwillingly, the words that I may utter will be taken as an expression not only of my own sentiments, but also of the current views in the Society and in the College. Turning, however, from myself to the Society and its work, I have to congratulate you on the steady progress made from year to year, and on the success which so far has attended our meetings this session. At no time in the history of our College has there been a more general desire to enjoy the advantages afforded by this Society; and the result is seen not only in the greater interest in its work manifested by the members, but also in the increased membership. While, however,

we welcome a large number of new members, we have also to notice the absence of some who last year stood in the foremost rank. We miss their well-known faces, but we part from them with less regret when we remember that it is only that they may enter upon their great life-work and apply in practice the lessons and the principles which they have learned within our College halls. There is one gap in our roll, however, which calls for a more particular notice. Last year we numbered among us one who, though just entering upon his collegiate course, gave promise of great usefulness as an earnest preacher of the Gospel. To all appearance, in perfect health, he had before him a prospect of many years' service in his Master's cause. But He who rules all things and guides them for the best, had willed it otherwise. Robert Lochore died suddenly of heart disease, on the 12th of March last, deeply lamented by all who knew him. It is not for us to penetrate into the inscrutable reasons why God in His Providence saw fit to remove from earth one who bid fair to take no mean place in the roll of His honoured servants, but there are many obvious lessons which we might learn from such an event. We shall not soon forget the deep impression which it made upon all our minds at the time ; and his brief life in our midst will not have been in vain if it has been the means of inciting us all to greater earnestness, so that altogether we may do more in the course of our lives than we would have done had he never been our fellow-student. It is no mere fancy to think of him as leaving to each one of us as a solemn charge a portion of that work which he might have accomplished, had he been spared to labour in the Master's vineyard.

It is not my intention to deliver a funeral oration, nor yet to point out the lessons which we ought to learn from such a sad event. But this, together with several other circumstances, has suggested to me the propriety of making a few remarks on *the necessity of earnestness in the Christian ministry.*

I make no apology for thus turning aside from the line of thought usual on such occasions as this, to a subject which is of such im-

mense importance to us all, though it may appear to be only commonplace. We may as well frankly confess that we are in great danger of losing much of our natural earnestness and enthusiasm while engaged in the work of preparation for the more active duties of life. As students of Systematic Theology, we are apt to crystallize Divine truth into our systems, and forget that it has a living power to mould human life and conduct. In our familiarity with it, we begin to look upon it with professional eyes, and regard it as something with which we must render ourselves familiar if we would take rank as licensed preachers of the Gospel. This is no new discovery, now made for the first time. It is no new experience now felt for the first time in our day, but one which has always been felt whenever any large measure of attention is given to the scientific study of the Bible. The intellect becomes strengthened at the expense of the emotions, and the free-flowing river of Gospel truth is frozen into a bed of theological ice. This is the tendency. Happily it does not often lead to these extreme results, owing to the counteracting power of other influences. But we must be constantly on our guard against it, and it is well that we should realize more keenly the necessity there is for earnestness as well as for scholarship, for deep feeling as well as for deep learning. This is a matter in which we have no choice left us, if we would fulfil the end we have in view.

The age demands earnestness of us. It were a mere truism to say that the age needs it. There never has been an age that did not need it. But we go further, and say that the age demands it, and will tolerate nothing short of it. The age in which we live may be characterized in many ways, according to the particular standpoint from which it is viewed. It may be called a progressive age, a literary age, a scientific age, a commercial age. But no one of these epithets describes it more truly than when we say it is an earnest age. There is an intensity now thrown into life, especially on this Continent, which was before unknown. When once an object has

been set up, the course is so planned as to lead to it with the greatest directness, even though to the neglect of other interests more important. There is an intensity in business pursuits. We are getting accustomed to the quick, nervous step of the active business man on our streets. We see them endeavouring to destroy time and space by the use of the railway and electric telegraph. The daily paper has entirely supplanted the weekly in business circles, and no one would think of carrying on any business enterprise without daily or almost hourly advices from the most distant parts of the world. One excitement treads on the heels of another, and business life becomes a constant hurry with them. The consequence is seen in the large number of cases of nervous prostration and premature decay. There is intensity in the pursuit of science. Nature is weighed, and her forces measured by the inquiring student, in order that she may be induced to disclose her secrets to the mind of man. The investigation enlists all the enthusiasm of many hearts, which bound with joy at the prospect of finding a key wherewith to unlock some of her hidden stores. The result of this over-stimulation is seen in the large number of extravagant scientific theories being given to the world, claiming to explain the operations of nature. There is intense activity in applying scientific principles to the purposes of practical life. Every new discovery is immediately questioned by the utilitarian spirit of the times as to the amount of material advantage it may confer on man. New principles are not allowed long to slumber on the pages of scientific books, but are speedily set to work to cater to man's pleasure or man's comfort. The result of this is apparent in the annual harvest of mechanical inventions pressed upon the world's notice as fitted to add something to human life and happiness. There is the same intense earnestness in the race for every other object in life, whether it belongs to the region of matter or of mind. And we may also affirm, without exposing ourselves to the charge of self-righteousness, that there is greater earnestness in religion now than in most preceding periods of the

world's history. It is not that dogmas are held with a firmer grasp, or fought for with fiercer zeal, but that there is a deeper conviction of the necessity of making religion a practical matter—a principle pervading the life as well as the mind. There is more missionary spirit in the churches, and a greater readiness on the part of church members to engage in what may be distinctively called Christian work. We thus find this earnestness, or rather this intensity, everywhere, in every pursuit, and in every walk of life, more strikingly developed and manifested now than at any previous time. It is not that the earnest men now are more earnest than the earnest men of past ages ; but there are more of them, and on account of the stimulus of competition, their efforts are more sustained. It is not that the earnestness of the present day is of the highest kind, but the prevailing spirit reaches, in some way or other, almost every individual. It is often a very different thing from moral earnestness, for it is frequently selfish, and ready to sacrifice the true and the good for the sake of some lower end ; but it gives a tone to the whole community. The pursuit may be one not worthy of the effort wasted on it ; but in any case the whole powers of the man are laid under tribute to attain it. He who will not so exert himself to the full extent of his ability, must be content to let the world pass on before him, while he struggles on behind as best he may. The world may have a certain degree of respect for cautious deliberation in practical matters of life, and tolerate it, but it seldom commends it, and seldomer still acts on it. To be slow is simply to be despised.

Whether this is the best state of society is open to question. But certain it is that this is the condition of highly civilized countries now, or the condition to which they are rapidly hastening. It is no strange thing, then, to find that the age demands something of the same spirit in the pulpit. It demands more and more that the preacher should have an earnest and practical subject to lay before them, and not the mere subtleties of a pedantic logic. It demands that he should speak of that subject in plain, earnest language, and

not simply with the fading beauties of a flowery rhetoric. It demands that he should throw into it all the deep feeling of a man who believes what he says, and is in earnest about it. It is in vain for us to cry out against mere excitement and sensationalism in preaching, unless we substitute for it something that will satisfy the demand and be in harmony with the rest of life. The mere performance of ceremonies will not do it. It must be truth set on fire by the earnestness of the speaker. This and this alone will prevent church-going from becoming a mere respectable recreation to a very large proportion of the people of our country. Men who are practical all the week will listen with impatience, or at most with toleration, to the bare statement of theoretical doctrines and fancies on the Sabbath. Men who seldom speak in their business transactions of things that are always taken for granted, are not to be won over to religion by the tedious repetition of things that they know and always have known, except in so far as these are made to apply to their consciences and the manner of their life. And in order that these doctrines may seize hold upon them, and become matters of real interest to them, it is necessary that they should be brought before them with an earnest purpose and an earnest manner. We have faith in Christianity as being the only true religion for this age as for any other, and we must not be ashamed of our belief. We believe that even the hurry, and the stir, and the bustle of the present day, may be sanctified by a love for the Christ of our Bible, and we must not shrink from the task of bringing Christian principles to bear with all their weight on this active life. But the edge must not be taken off them through a want of keen earnestness, if we would be successful. The age that has hitched the lightning to its chariot, and sweeps by on the wings of the wind, will not be guided in its course by the weather-beaten finger-boards of past generations. It will give heed to none but the earnest warnings and plain directions that compel attention even from the most thoughtless. If, therefore, we would not let mankind rush by us on the fatal road to

ruin, we must proclaim with manly earnest words the message which we bear as ambassadors and servants of the Most High, commissioned to warn and appointed to lead the generation in which our lot is cast to a higher, a better, and a purer life,

It may be said, perhaps, that the age is wrong, that its tendency is a dangerous one, that the demand which it makes is an unreasonable one. It may be said that it is a mistake to pander to its wishes, that this attempt to make the Gospel suit the age has led to the degradation of the pulpit, has given rise to startling sensationalism for the purpose of catching the ear of the world. It may be said that the influence exerted should be the influence of the truth alone, and not the influence of any one who may chance to be the bearer of the message. Granted, if you will. But this does not make it any the less the duty of the Christian minister to be intensely in earnest, and that because the age demands it. Suppose that the age *is* wrong; that it is selfishness rather than moral earnestness which lies at the bottom of our enterprise and our business activity; is not our object to make it better? And shall it be said that we are less zealous in our object than the world is in its object? Even suppose that the demand which it makes on the pulpit *is* an unreasonable one; ought we refuse to attempt the task when our only choice is between attempting that and utter failure? True it is that the influence we exert on the age should be not a personal one, but that of the truth we proclaim; yet we must remember that the influence of that truth will depend on the whole very much on the manner in which it is presented, and that we are ever bound to present it, so far as we can, in that manner which is best calculated to gain the earnest attention of the world. The truth itself will ever remain the same, but the manner of presenting it must vary with the age for which it is intended. It must be cast in the mould of modern thought, and be tinged with the hue of modern experience. To borrow an illustration from a recent writer: it is like an engineer's line. When surveying for a railway he lays down the line level, or as nearly level

as the configuration of the surface will permit. But this level is not a straight line. It is the segment of a circle—that circle being the circumference of the globe. The line which practically constitutes a level bends downwards continually as it goes forward, following the form of the earth, and at every point being at right angles to the radius. If it were produced in an absolutely straight line, it would, in the course of a few miles, be high and dry above the surface of the earth, and entirely useless for the practical purposes of life. Very similar to this would be the result, were the manner of presenting truth, which may have suited well enough the demands of a past age, to be continued in the present. We must cause truth to touch the level at every point in the progress of the race, and I would hazard the assertion that it is impossible to do this in our day without something more than the average earnestness of the past. Men will no longer submit patiently to the ecclesiastical shackles imposed upon them by authority. They must be made to them living principles, quickened into life by the earnest enthusiasm of him who seeks to win their assent, so that they may freely and willingly bow to the truth, because they feel it to be true. Let us not think, then, to go forth into the world with a system of theology ready made, and seek to indoctrinate men in its logical niceties merely, and then leave it with them, as though our Gospel were, “believe on this system of theology and thou shalt be saved.” We shall find ourselves sadly mistaken in thinking that thereby we can make any deep impression on men’s minds. These truths must be tipped with the fire from our own hearts, if they are to burn into the hearts of men in an age such as ours, when there is so much to sear and harden, as well as to arouse. The age, then, demands it of us, if there were nothing else. But there is something else.

The subject of which we have to speak is one that demands the greatest earnestness from us. This is not the proper time, neither am I the proper person, to prove to you the importance of this subject. I take it for granted that all will concede the infinite moment

of a theme which is drawn from the interests of eternity. It is no light matter to speak to immortal souls on a subject which so nearly concerns their future. Were our subject merely one of passing interest, we could easily find an excuse for becoming enthusiastic over it. Were we speaking to men on a matter which concerned merely their welfare here, moral earnestness would be in place. How much more intense should be our earnestness in speaking of that which affects both this world and the next, which is to make their happiness or deepen their misery for ever. The world rings with the praises of those who, for the sake of justice, or liberty, for the sake of the welfare of their fellow-men, have spent their lives in untiring toil, or sealed their sincerity with their blood. And how much greater reason is there why we, who are the advocates for undying truth, and the messengers of heavenly peace, should enlist all our powers and faculties in the one life-task which that position imposes upon us. We shall soon be made painfully conscious that the world judges of the importance of religion from the estimation in which it seems to be held by those who are appointed its teachers and guardians in their midst. If, therefore, we would have them believe that it is the most important thing in the world, it will only be by our showing that we consider it so. Just here is our danger. Our very familiarity with the subject, so vast, so many-sided, and so incomprehensible, tends to make us less in earnest about it, and blunts our own sense of its importance. The children of Egypt soon learn to play gleefully amid the solemn ruins of the forgotten past, and under the very shadows of the pyramids before which the stranger stands in awe. The very closeness of our inspection of Divine truth prevents us from seeing its majesty and its overwhelming import. But, assuredly, if ever any matter deserved the most serious consideration, this does. If ever any subject called for deep feeling, this does. If ever any principle was worth burning ourselves out for by ardent, irrepressible enthusiasm, this is. If nothing else, the burden of our subject should weigh us down into a terrible earnestness.

Furthermore, we ought to remember the object which we have in view. It is not simply to discharge our consciences by telling men the truth, whether they will hear it or not. It is not merely to stand up on certain solemn occasions, and in well-measured sentences propound our views of certain doctrines. That is only one means to the end. The end is to make men better, and holier, and happier. The object for which we ought to strive is not to have well-filled churches, but to influence the character of men for good, to make men fit for the Kingdom of Heaven, to restore the fallen nature, to re-adorn the marred image of the Creator with the beauty and the grace of holiness. This, truly, is the noblest work in which any one can possibly be engaged—to be makers of men; and if there is one thing more certain than another, it is this, that such a high object is not to be attained in any great degree by anything short of the most heartfelt earnestness in the work. Even under the most favourable circumstances, it is no easy thing to accomplish, and as a matter of fact, the circumstances are generally very unfavourable. Even to train up children to such a character requires tact and perseverance, and firmness. How then but by a whole-souled devotion can we expect to influence and build up men? How otherwise can we expect to impress our ideas upon them, and make them feel the power of the truth we teach them? There is so much to draw them in the other direction, so much to make all our efforts vain, that we cannot afford to trifle with men, and speak to them merely in the line of our profession. They need impulse as well as instruction, and they must catch from us some of that earnestness which will enable them to rise above self and the world into the purer atmosphere of noble purposes and high-toned manliness. True, it may be said that here we do not labour alone, and that in no single instance is success due to our efforts. But I am not concerned here with the theological aspect of the case, and however firmly we may maintain the necessity of divine interference, yet there is no getting past the fact, that practically results such as we desire are made to follow only from

human effort, and that the greatest results almost invariably attend the most earnest, faithful endeavours. The Reformation of the sixteenth century was kindled by the earnestness of Martin Luther and his fellow-Reformers. The foundation of Scotland's Protestantism was laid firm and deep by the terrible earnestness of John Knox. The spiritual restoration of England was effected through the fiery earnestness of Whitefield and Wesley. Were we to call for the testimony of the great army of those who have been useful in their day and generation as ministers of the Gospel, we should find that they attributed any success which they may have had to their earnestness rather than to their superior talents or attainments.

I may not forget, however, gentlemen, that I am addressing you now as members of a Society which has for its object the cultivation of the power of expression ; and it may be thought that this matter is one with which we have nothing to do here. But so far is this from being true, I believe our training in this Society has a close relation to this very feeling of earnestness. Allow me very briefly to state and explain that relation.

Notwithstanding all that has been said, and I do not mean to say anything now to lessen its importance, earnestness is not everything. All experience goes to prove that the earnestness of ignorance is fanaticism—the disguised, but no less real enemy of true religion and of all stability of character. It must, therefore, receive the foundation of a sound education, which at once gives information and strengthens the mental powers. While we must be careful not to chill or expel deep feeling by over-refinement or too much attention to dry detail, we cannot afford to dispense with that liberal training which, like ballast, is needed to steady the ship and to prevent the wind in the sails from overturning it.

There may be, however, learning and earnestness combined without any great influence being exerted, because of a want of the power of expressing it, and so communicating the vital power within to all around. It will not do to say that under such circumstances ear-

nestness will find some way of expressing itself—it may be after a manner peculiar, it may be in defiance of all recognized rules, but it will make itself felt. Granted. In like manner an acorn will sprout from under a stone and make its way out by some means. But it comes out a crooked, slender stem, and no one would be foolish enough to deny that it would have grown far better had the stone been removed. So we need cultivation of the power of expression, that the feeling within may not only be communicated, but communicated in the best possible way. The impediments, as far as possible, ought to be removed out of the way, so as to give free, full, and effective utterance to the thought within, and in such a way as to express with it the depth of feeling which is associated with it. It is only in so far as earnestness is expressed that it can exercise an influence over others.

Now our Society does not pretend to give learning, except in a very small degree. Least of all does it give earnestness. But it trains in the power of expression. There lies its value and its usefulness. In so far as it accomplishes that, it attains its end. Other incidental ends may be gained at the same time, such as the influence which mutual association must always have on character ; but this, after all, is the object which must be constantly kept before us, and it is the bounden duty of every one who is looking forward to such a position as that of the Christian ministry, in which personal influence must be exerted very largely through the power of speech, to avail himself of every opportunity of cultivating that power, so as to acquire an easy and graceful expression. A mere acquaintance with rules is of little value until they have been so practised as to become natural and unconscious.

Here comes in the great stock excuse from those who are unwilling to undergo any such training, or devote time to any such practice ; viz, that many of the men who have risen to the highest eminence have never submitted to it, but have simply spoken out earnestly and naturally in the language that first came to them, and with a manner

that was entirely their own. The fact is unquestionable, though probably the number of such men is very much smaller than is generally supposed, for we must never take it for granted that because a man is perfectly natural in his manner of delivery, he is therefore untrained. This is the very perfection of art, and the very end that it strives to attain. Yet, admitting that there are such cases as are thus held up for examples to us, it would be an easy thing to retort that these would have been greater men had they been carefully trained. But there is a deeper answer that may be given. All men are not alike in the measure of their powers. There are some few who hit upon a high degree of natural excellence without any special culture. But these few are no fair specimens of the mass. There are a few people in the world that have genius who rise above all ordinary rules. But surely no one will maintain that the method which gives freedom to the exercise of genius is the best method for the great proportion of those who enter on a professional life. For the great majority, who have and always will have only the average ability, no training can be too careful, no drill too thorough.

The difference between these two classes, and the absurdity of pleading the example of the one class for the guidance of the other, may be made more apparent by an illustration. There are two ways in which a fire may be put out. The storm from above may sweep over the place, and pouring out of its cloudy reservoir torrents of rain, may so thoroughly drench everything that not an ember remains of all the flames. This is the most natural way, the easiest way, and oftentimes indeed proves a most effectual way. And yet that city would certainly be wanting in common foresight that would trust entirely to the rain from heaven to extinguish its fires and preserve it from loss. For ordinary emergencies there must be an elaborate and very prosaic system of reservoirs, and water-pipes, and fire-engines, and hose, to accomplish what might be accomplished by a shower of rain, if it could only be commanded at the proper time. The method of genius bears a striking resemblance to the action of nature in making

clouds and sending rain. Towering high up above the great mass of mankind, he gathers his materials by an almost unconscious principle of selection from the most diverse and the most unlikely sources. These materials, refined and purified as they are gathered, like the vapour that ascends to heaven from every ocean and stream and stagnant pool, accumulate, and in due time are given to the world again, to sway, to refresh, and to elevate mankind, or come down like a torrent to sweep away sin and wrong-doing from the face of the earth. But there are very few of us have genius, and therefore we must have recourse to the prosaic, but on the whole more effective method of diligently cultivating whatever powers we have, that we may make the best possible use of them. We must construct our reservoirs and fill them by means of hard study and solid learning. We must perfect our method of turning all our power on one object by the most careful practice and cultivation.

And yet we must be careful not to give either one or the other of these a prominence in our practical work which they do not deserve. The object of learning is not to show how learned we are, but to communicate it to others in such a way that it will benefit them. The object of elocution is not to show the world how well we can express our ideas, and with what grace we can deliver them, but to enable us to express our ideas in such a way that their full power may be felt. The object of earnestness, if it can be said to have an object at all, is not to show how earnest we are, but to give our words sufficient weight and moral power to influence men's hearts and lives. That learning, that manner of expression, or that earnestness which calls attention to the person of the speaker rather than to the subject of which he speaks, is all wrong—an utter failure. Let us remember we have a mission in the world, and one that is entirely distinct from ourselves, one of which our praise and honour form no part. That mission is the reclaiming of a sinful, fallen world. It is one which is by no means easy to accomplish, but demands our whole powers. It requires of us that we should become

so much alive to the real state of the case and the importance of remedying its evils, that we shall be carried out of our own selfish selves, and burn in our hearts with the fire of earnestness for the accomplishment of this glorious end. It requires of us that we should leave no means untried whereby we can increase our power and our facility in bringing the truth we feel to bear on the busy world around us. The truth which we have in our hands is God's own truth. Let us not mutilate it or deprive it of its living power by imperfections of our own making. The cause in which we are embarked is God's own cause. We know it must triumph in the end ; but in the meantime let us not hinder its progress or bring it into contempt by our want of earnestness or by our want of culture.



